DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 155 JC 840 629

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TITLE Longitudinal Study of Performance of Students Entering Harper College, 1973-1983. Volume 13, Number 3.
INSTITUTION William Rainey Harper Coll., Palatine, Ill. Office of Planning and Research.
PUB DATE 23 Nov 84
NOTE 19p.; For a related document, see ED 237 157.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Statistical Data (110)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Academic Persistence; Age; Community Colleges; *Educational Trends; Grade Point Average; Grading; Longitudinal Studies; *Student Characteristics; Trend Analysis; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students

ABSTRACT

A longitudinal study was conducted at William Rainey Harper College (WRHC) to provide basic institutional data about student performance and achievement based on an analysis of student academic records. Samples of 200 full-time and 200 part-time students were selected from successive classes from 1973 through 1983. Study findings included the following: (1) over the years, student grade point averages (GPA's) rose and fell in direct relationship to changes in the grading policy; (2) in years when grading policies were most favorable to students, the average GPA reached over 2.6, while in recent years grades returned to a 2.35 level; (3) full-time students entering WRHC before they were 21 had an average GPA of 2.54, while full-time students entering after age 21 had an average GPA of 2.9; (4) persistence rates remained fairly constant over the years; (5) the average full-time student accumulated 44 hours while attending WRHC for 4.7 semesters, and the average part-time student earned 17.5 credit hours and attended 3.5 semesters; (6) approximately 36% of the full-time students and 11% of the part-time students earned a degree or certificate; and (7) there was a trend toward fewer students officially transferring credit hours from other colleges, even though the percentage of students with previous college experience remained fairly constant. A series of data tables detail findings. (Author/LAL)

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Volume XIII, No. 8
November 22, 1984

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William Rainey Harper College

Longitudinal Study of Performance of Students Entering Harper College, 1973-1983

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ABSTRACT

THIS STUDY FOLLOWED SAMPLES OF SUCCESSIVE CLASSES (1973-1983) OF 200 FULL-TIME AND 200 PART-TIME STUDENTS EACH YEAR IN A LONGITUDINAL MANNER. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY WAS TO PROVIDE SOME BASIC INSTITUTIONAL DATA ABOUT STUDENT PERFORMANCE OVER TIME. DATA WAS OBTAINED ON THEIR PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT AT HARPER THROUGH ANALYSIS OF THE ACADEMIC RECORDS OF EACH OF THE STUDENTS SAMPLED.

OVER THE YEARS THE GRADE POINT AVERAGE OF A STUDENT HAS RISEN AND FALLEN IN DIRECT RELATIONSHIP TO CHANGES IN THE GRADING POLICY. IN YEARS WHEN POLICIES WERE MOST FAVORABLE TO STUDENTS, THE AVERAGE GPA REACHED OVER 2.6 WHILE IN RECENT YEARS, THEY HAVE RETURNED TO THE 2.35 LEVEL. IT WAS ALSO NOTED OLDER STUDENTS ACHIEVE A MUCH HIGHER GPA THAN YOUNGER STUDENTS.

PERSISTENCE HAS REMAINED FAIRLY CONSTANT OVER THE YEARS. THE AVERAGE FULL-TIME STUDENT WILL ACCUMULATE 44 HOURS WHILE AT HARPER 4.7 SEMESTERS, AND 36 PERCENT WILL EARN A DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE. THE AVERAGE PART-TIME STUDENT WILL ACCUMULATE 17½ HOURS AND ATTEND 3½ SEMESTERS AT HARPER, AND ABOUT 11 PERCENT OF THESE STUDENTS WILL ACHIEVE A DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE AT HARPER. OLDER STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO STAY ONLY A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME AT HARPER AS MANY HAVE ONLY SHORT-TERM GOALS. HOWEVER, OF THOSE WHO DO STAY BEYOND TWO SEMESTERS, OLDER STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO PERSIST TO GRADUATION.

THERE SEEMS TO BE A TREND FOR FEWER STUDENTS TO TRANSFER THEIR CREDITS INTO HARPER FROM OTHER COLLEGES ATTENDED. IT ALSO APPEARS THAT IN RECENT YEARS FEWER FULL-TIME STUDENTS THAN EVER TAKE CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSES. MORE THAN ONE-FOURTH OF THE PART-TIME DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS ALSO TAKE CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSES AND THAT IS UNCHANGED OVER THE YEARS. SIMILAR TO THE NATIONAL TRENDS, THE ACT COMPOSITE SCORES OF ENTERING STUDENTS HAVE BEEN DROPPING OVER THE YEARS EVEN THOUGH THEIR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS RANK HAS REMAINED CONSTANT.

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Purpose

The purpose of this study is to follow samples of beginning full-time and part-time traditional credit students over a long period of time observing their performance and achievements at Harper College. This type of longitudinal study provides the answer to such questions as: What percentage of all full-time students starting at Harper will ever graduate or accumulate 36 hours of credit or attend four semesters or will take Continuing Education courses? The same questions can be answered about beginning part-time students. Other questions can also be answered such as their GPA, whether they have transferred into Harper, their age and their standing in their high school graduating class.

Population Surveyed

A random sample of 200 full-time and 200 part-time beginning traditional credit students has been gathered from the population of students entering each fall from 1967 to 1983. This report shows only students who have entered from fall of 1973 to fall of 1983.

Method Used

Transcript data have been gathered on all students in the target samples and the data analyzed. The data was first separated by full time and part time by the year the student started and then was separated by full and part time by the age that the student started at Harper.

Discussion of Results

There have been three policy decisions which have affected the grade point average of students over the years. The first occurred in 1972 when students were able to repeat failed courses and replace the old D or F with the new grade rather than just averaging it in. The second policy change came in 1974 and allowed faculty to give N grades rather than Fs to students who simply did not attend. The third policy change occurred in the fall of 1982 when the College dropped the N grade. The following table shows the average grade point of students in these four periods of time.

Student started as a:	Before Policy Changes 1967-1971	Repeat and Replacement of Grade Policy Instituted 1972-1973	N Grade Instituted 1974-1981	N Grade Dropped 1982-1983
Full-time Student	1.95	2.31	2.62	2.35
Part-time Student	2.25	2.29	2.70	2.37

This table shows that grade point average was affected drastically by the N grade policy. When it was instituted in 1974, GPA rose dramatically and when the use of N grades was stopped in the fall of 1982, GAP dropped dramatically. The repeat and grade replacement policy instituted in 1972 affected primarily full-time students who would stay around long enough to repeat courses and replace low grades.

Grade average is also greatly affected by the age of the students when they enter Harper. For example, full-time students entering before they are 21 average 2.54 while full-time students entering after they are 21 or older average 2.90. Part-time students who enter while they are under 21 average 2.20. Those between 21 and 34 average 2.90 and those 35 or older average 3.09.

Discussion of Results (continued)

Persistence rates have remained fairly constant over the years. About 64 percent of students who start full time one fall return the next fall. Among part-time students since 1975 about 40 percent have returned one year later. Many community college students follow stop-out patterns of in and out of college. Thus we find over 14 percent of students who start full time do not return one year later but return at a later time. This percentage for part-timers is about sixteen.

Part-time students average about 3.6 semesters attended during their history at Harper while students starting full time will average 4.7 semesters attended. Interestingly, 16½ percent of students starting part time attend seven or more semesters at Harper while more than 19 percent of those starting full time will attend Harper seven or more semesters. The term "a two-year college" seems to be a misnomer.

Students starting as full-time students will eventually complete about 44 credit hours on the average, while the average student starting part time will complete between 17 and 18 credit hours at Harper. Over the years about 36 percent of all persons starting as full-time students will eventually achieve a degree or certificate at Harper. Moreover, half will achieve alumni status (48 hours or degree or certificate). Among those starting as part-time students, the percentage graduating dips to 11 percent while 15 percent reached alumni status. There seems to be no trend in these percentages over the years.

Older students on the average accumulate fewer credit hours and stay at Harper fewer semesters when compared to younger students. On the other hand, both younger and older students have about equal probability of achieving a degree or certificate. These averages, however, mask some of the dynamics that are occuring. A much higher percentage of older students are staying for a short period of time (2 semesters or less). For example, 33 percent of the full-time older students stay for two semesters or less versus 22 percent for the younger full-time students. Among part-time students, the trend is similar -- 54 percent for older versus 43 percent for younger. Presumeably, many of the short term older students had only short term goals to start with; that is, they only wanted to take a few specific courses. Thus, if we examine only those students staying beyond two semesters, we find older students are more likely to persist to graduation (among full-time students, 59 percent for older versus 46 percent for younger -- among part-time students, 25 percent for older versus 21 percent for younger).

There seems to be a trend over the years of fewer students officially transferring credit hours from other colleges. In the early '70s, about 12 percent of the full-time students transferred credit hours into Harper, but from 1976-1982 only about 8 percent of the full-time students have transferred in credits while in 1983 only 3 percent transferred in credits. Moreover, in the early '70s, 12 percent of the part-time students transferred credits to Harper, but this dropped to 9 percent in the late '70s and early '80s and to only 3 percent in 1983. Despite this trend, other studies have shown that about 35 percent of Harper's degree credit students had previously attended another college and this has been constant over the years. Thus in recent years it seems fewer students are taking advantage of transferring in credits from their previous college background. As would be expected, older students (especially full-time ones) are much more likely to transfer in credits.

It appears that among full-time students, fewer are taking continuing education courses. For example, just under 22 percent of those starting as full-time

students in the early '70s, took continuing education courses and this percentage decreased to 15 percent in the late '70s, and in recent years it has fallen to 10 percent. More than one-fourth of the part-time degree credit students also take continuing education courses but in this case, there appears to be no trend over the years. Again, as would be expected, older students are much more likely to take continuing education courses along with their degree credit courses.

The average age of entering full-time students is 19 and for entering part-time students it is just over 26. The average school rank for both full-time and part-time students is about the 62nd percentile. Consistent with nationwide trends, ACT scores of entering students have been falling over the years. In the early '70s, the mean ACT composite was 19.0 for both full-time and part-time students, but this has fallen to 17.7 in recent years for full-time students and even lower for part-time students.

Major Conclusions

Over the years the grade point average of a student has risen and fallen in direct relationship to changes in the grading policy. In years when policies were most favorable to students, the average GPA reached over 2.6 while in recent years, they have returned to the 2.35 level. It was also noted older students achieve a much higher GPA than younger students.

Persistence has remained fairly constant over the years. The average full-time student will accumulate 44 hours while at Harper 4.7 semesters, and 36 percent will earn a degree or certificate. The average part-time student will accumulate 17½ hours and attend 3½ semesters at Harper, and about 11 percent of these students will achieve a degree or certificate at Harper. Older students are more likely to stay only a short period of time at Harper as many have only short-term goals. However, of those who do stay beyond two semessters, older students are more likely to persist to graduation.

There seems to be a trend for fewer students to transfer their credits into Harper from other colleges attended. It also appears that in recent years fewer full-time students than ever take continuing education courses. More than one-fourth of the part-time degree credit students also take continuing education courses and that is unchanged over the years. Similar to the national trends, the ACT composite scores of entering students have been dropping over the years even though their high school class rank has remained constant.

LONGITUDINAL DATA OF FULL-TIME DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS AT HARPER

	Students Beinning in the Fall of:										
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sample Size	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Withdrew before establishing a GPA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean GPA	2.30	2.60	2.63	2.64	2.64	2.68	2.63	2.57	2.55	2.20	2.50
Mean Cumulative Hours Attempted	43.39	46.62	43.86	43.98	46.03	47.30	45.55	48.60	44.81	37.70	24.29
Mean Cumulative Hours Passed	40.73	45.68	42.93	42.66	45.20	46.69	44.46	46.30	42.34	34.59	22.82
Percent Registered 1 year later	56.0	68.5	60.0	59.5	60.5	65.0	65.0	68.0	67.0	70.5	55.0
Percent not registered one year later but who return at another time	16.5	12.0	14.5	16.0	16.0	12.0	11.5	15.5	7.0	7.0	0
Percent who never return after first year	27.5	19.5	25.5	24.5	23.5	23.0	23.5	16.5	26.0	22.5	35.0
Average number of semesters registered	4.58	4.91	4.56	4.60	4.70	4.75	4.60	4.80	4.40	3.70	1.72
Percent Registering for:											
One Semester	8.5	4.5	7.0	4.5	4.5	6.0	5.5	4.5	4.0	8.0	14.5
Two Semesters	19.0	16.0	18.0	17.0	17.0	16.0	16.5	9.0	19.5	19.5	76.0
Three Semesters	13.0	9.5	13.0	17.0	13.5	8.0	11.0	12.5	10.5	11.5	9.5
Four Semesters	14.0	20.5	15.0	15.5	15.0	16.0	17.0	19.5	16.0	31.0	0
Five Semesters	14.0	14.5	17.0	18.5	16.0	18.5	20.0	16.5	22.0	20.0	0
Six Semesters	12.0	13.0	14.0	10.5	13.0	13.0	13.5	18.5	14.5	10.0	0
Seven or More Semesters	19.5	22.0	16.0	17.0	21.0	22.5	16.5	19.5	13.5	0	0

LONGITUDINAL DATA OF FULL-TIME DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS AT HARPER (continued)

	1978	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Percent Passing:											
Under 24 hours, no degree	28.5	19.0	20.5	20.0	19.5	15.0	25.5	14.0	24.0	28.0	43.5
34-35 hours, no degree	17.0	18.0	23.0	35.5	20.5	19.5	14.0	19.5	19.5	21.0	54.0
36-47 hours, no degree	10.0	9.5	8.0	8.0	6.0	13.5	11.0	10.0	12.0	20.5	1.0
48 or more hours, no degree	9.0	14.0	12.0	17.0	13.5	15.5	13.5	22.0	17.5	20.0	0
48 or more hours, with degree	31.5	37.0	32.0	25.5	38.0	33.5	34.5	29.0	25.5	9.0	0
Less than 48 hours with degree	3.0	1.0	3.0	1.0	1.5	1.5	.5	2.5	.5	0	0
Certificate only	1.0	1.5	1.5	3.0	1.0	1.5	1.0	3.0	1.0	1.5	1.5
Percent transferring into Harper officially	13.5	9.5	14.0	6.5	9.0	7.0	6.0	12.5	8.0	7.5	3.0
Percent taking Continuing Education Courses	21.5	24.5	20.5	21.5	18.0	15.0	12.0	10.0	9.0	4.0	1.0
Percent taking degree credit courses first	20.5	23.0	18.5	18.0	15.0	10.5	10.5	9.0	6.0	4.0	0
Percent taking Continuing Education courses first	1.0	.5	2.0	1.5	1.5	0	.5	.5	2.0	0	.5
Percent taking them Simultaneously	0	1.0	0	1.5	1.5	4.5	1.0	.5	1.0	0	.5
Mean Age	18.3	18.7	19.3	18.7	18.7	18.1	18.4	18.7	18.4	18.4	18.5
Sample Size Age	167	194	179	194	192	190	194	196	197	198	197
Mean High School Rank	58.4	62.0	59.5	63.1	63.8	63.7	63.0	64.9	59.4	58.2	60.9
Sample Size High School Rank	138	161	166	167	189	165	156	168	184	179	177
Mean ACT Composite	19.0	19.0	18.9	18.9	18.2	18.2	17.4	18.9	17.3	16.5	17.9
Sample Size ACT	113	47	111	55	110	46	43	88	125	111	74
Entire Entering College					18.3	17.6	17.8	17.5	17.4	17.4	16.8
ACT Composite					1194	2514	1354	1038	1509	2435	766

LONGITUDINAL DATA OF PART-TIME DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS AT HARPER

	Students Beginning in the Fall of:										
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Sample Size	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Withdrew before establishing a GPA	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean GPA	2.31	2.86	2.64	2.65	2.75	2.70	2.68	2.62	2.70	2.27	2.47
Mean Cumulative Hours Attempted	17.98	15.54	17.22	21.51	20.41	20.77	17.70	17.80	17.90	11.38	8.01
Mean Cumulative Hours Passed	16.68	15.04	16.51	20.41	19.81	19.77	16.80	16.40	16.50	10.06	7.11
Percent Registered 1 year later	31.5	32.0	32.0	39.0	36.5	43.5	41.5	37.5	44.5	40.0	38.0
Percent not registered one year later but who returned at another time	16.0	15.5	15.0	14.5	16.5	15.5	19.0	15.0	8.0	5.0	0
Percent who never returned after first year	52.5	52.5	53.0	46.5	47.0	41.0	39.5	47.5	47.5	55.0	62.0
Average number of semesters registered	3.3	3.4	3.6	4.0	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.5	3.2	2.5	1.46
Percent Registering for:											
One Semester	38.0	34.5	29.5	21.5	30.5	23.0	21.5	27.0	26.5	33.5	55.0
Two Semesters	19.5	24.5	24.5	27.5	20.5	20.5	22.0	19.0	23.5	28.5	44.5
Three Semesters	10.5	10.5	13.0	11.5	11.5	16.5	18.0	17.0	12.5	9.5	.5
Four Semesters	9.5	6.0	7.0	9.5	8.5	10.0	10.0	8.5	9.0	17.5	0
Five Semesters	4.0	3.0	3.5	5.5	3.0	5.0	6.5	7.0	11.5	8.0	0
Six Semesters	4.5	5.5	3.5	7.5	5.0	9.0	8.0	5.5	7.0	3.0	0
Seven or More Semesters	14.0	16.0	19.0	17.0	21.0	16.0	14.0	16.0	10.0	0	0

LONGITUDINAL DATA OF PART-TIME DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS AT HARPER (continued)

	Students Beginning in the Fall of:										
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Percent Passing:											
Under 12 hours, no degree	63.0	61.5	55.5	49.5	54.0	50.5	55.0	54.0	57.0	66.0	79.5
12-23 hours, no degree	14.0	14.5	22.5	21.0	18.5	21.0	18.5	21.0	20.0	16.5	19.0
24-35 hours, no degree	4.5	8.5	5.5	8.0	6.0	6.0	9.0	8.0	7.5	7.0	1.5
36-47 hours, no degree	2.5	1.5	3.5	3.0	3.5	8.0	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	0
48 hours or more, no degree	5.0	1.5	3.0	8.0	4.5	5.5	1.5	5.5	5.0	3.5	0
48 hours or more with degree	8.5	6.5	6.0	7.5	10.5	5.5	6.0	2.5	4.0	0	0
Less than 48 hours with degree	1.5	4.0	1.0	1.5	1.5	1.5	2.5	1.0	0	0	0
Certificate Only	1.0	2.0	3.0	1.5	1.5	2.0	3.0	3.5	2.0	2.5	0
Percent ransferring into Harper officially	11.5	14.5	9.0	9.0	10.5	7.0	11.5	7.5	9.5	9.0	3.0
Percent taking Continuing Education Courses	24.5	31.0	32.5	20.5	32.5	26.0	28.5	16.0	22.5	10.0	14.0
Percent taking degree credit courses first	20.5	19.0	23.0	17.0	16.0	22.0	20.0	10.5	12.0	7.0	2.5
Percent Taking Continuing Education courses first	3.0	10.0	7.5	1.5	4.0	1.0	2.5	2.0	7.5	1.0	8.5
Percent taking them simultaneously	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	12.5	3.0	6.0	3.5	3.0	2.0	3.0
Mean Age	23.6	28.4	26.6	25.6	26.9	25.6	25.7	25.9	24.8	25.4	26.6
Sample Size Age	133	197	168	183	189	183	192	194	184	197	192
Mean High School Rank	60.6	65.0	60.7	62.5	66.3	65.2	63.2	60.6	63.4	62.2	62.9
Sample Size Rank	120	153	156	171	183	155	144	148	164	171	134
Mean ACT Composite	19.0	20.3	17.4	15.4	17.3	16.3	16.2	14.5	15.8	15.0	16.4
Sample Size ACT	26	3	22	12	29	14	9	21	39	27	19

LONGITUDINAL DATA OF DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS AT HARPER

	Full-Time Students Beginning 1972-1980			Part-Time Students Beginning 1972-1980			
	Under 21 Years of Age	21 and Older	Age Unknown	Under 21 Years of Age	21-34 Years of Age	35 and Older	Age Unknown
Sample Size	1,563	113	124	680	650	282	188
Withdrew before establishing a GPA	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Mean GPA	2.54	2.90	2.45	2.20	2.90	3.09	2.46
Mean Cumulative Hours Attempted	45.95	38.77	46.42	23.96	17.03	13.50	13.8
Mean Cumulative Hours Passed	44.54	37.91	44.00	21.99	16.51	13.29	12.3
Percent Registered 1 year later	63.2	54.9	58.1	41.2	33.5	33.7	27.7
Percent not registered one year later but who returned at another time	13.9	8.8	17.7	18.8	15.4	12.8	11.7
Percent who never returned after first year	22.9	36.3	24.2	40.0	51.1	53.5	60.6
Average number of semesters registered	4.7	4.0	4.8	3.9	3.7	3.4	2.9
Percent Registering for:							
One Semester	5.5	8.0	8.1	22.2	32.0	31.9	42.0
Two Semesters	16.4	24.8	13.7	21.4	21.1	23.8	24.5
Three Semesters	11.8	15.9	11.3	14.0	12.3	13.1	8.5
Four Semesters	16.8	12.4	19.3	10.7	6.6	7.4	5.8
Five Semesters	16.4	20.3	13.7	5.9	5.5	1.4	4.3
Six Semesters	14.0	6.2	12.1	7.4	4.6	7.5	4.8
Seven or More Semesters	19.1	12.4	21.8	18.4	17.9	14.9	10.1

LONGITUDINAL DATA OF DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS AT HARPER (continued)

Percent Passing:	Full-Time Students Beginning 1972-1980			Part-Time Students Beginning 1972-1980			
	Under 21 Years of Age	21 and Older	Age Unknown	Under 21 Years of Age	21-34 Years of Age	35 and Older	Age Unknown
Under 12 hours, no degree	19.8	23.9	25.0	43.4	59.4	66.0	71.8
12-23 hours, no degree				22.4	17.2	14.9	11.7
24-35 hours, no degree	20.5	18.6	14.5	11.6	4.6	4.6	3.2
36-47 hours, no degree	9.3	9.7	5.7	5.1	3.2	2.8	1.6
48 hours or more, no degree	14.1	8.0	16.1	5.9	3.8	1.8	2.7
48 hours or more with degree	33.4	25.7	33.9	8.4	6.5	4.6	5.3
Less than 48 hours with degree	1.2	9.7	4.0	1.0	2.8	2.5	0
Certificate Only	1.7	4.4	.8	2.2	2.5	2.8	3.7
Percent transferring into Harper officially	7.2	45.1	15.3	6.6	15.2	9.2	5.9
Percent taking Continuing Education Courses	16.9	29.2	24.1	17.9	29.3	39.0	23.9
Percent taking degree credit Courses first	15.2	27.4	17.7	16.0	21.5	20.9	16.0
Percent taking Continuing Education courses first	.6	.9	4.8	.3	2.9	12.1	5.8
Percent taking them Simultaneously	1.1	.9	1.6	1.6	4.9	6.0	2.1
Mean Age	18.5	27.6	--	18.8	26.9	42.8	--
Mean High School Rank	61.7	57.5	53.8	57.7	68.7	68.6	56.6
Sample Size Rank	1,306	81	37	551	483	194	34
Mean ACT Composite	18.9	18.7	16.5	17.0	13.3	--	19.3
Sample Size ACT	632	14	28	132	18	--	3

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